



House prepares to pass landmark voting rights, ethics bill

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and
LISA MASCARO

Associated Press

Washington (AP) — House Democrats are poised to pass a sweeping elections and ethics bill, offering it up as a powerful counterweight to voting rights restrictions advancing in Republican-controlled statehouses across the country.

House Resolution 1, which touches on virtually every aspect of the electoral process, would restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to a murky campaign finance system that allows wealthy donors to anonymously bankroll political causes.

This bill "will put a stop at

the voter suppression that we're seeing debated right now," said Rep. Nikema Williams, a new congresswoman who represents the Georgia district that deceased voting rights champion John Lewis held for years. "This bill is the 'Good Trouble' he fought for his entire life."

To Republicans, though, it would herald a massive expansion of the federal government's role in elections, infringing on states that limit ballot access in the name of election security.

"If this were to become law it would be the largest expansion of the federal government's role in our elections that we've ever seen," said Rep. Rodney Davis, R-Ill.

Continued on next page



Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and the Democratic Caucus gather to address reporters on H.R. 1, the For the People Act of 2021, at the Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, March 3, 2021.

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Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., lower left, and members of the Democratic Caucus gather to address reporters on H.R. 1, the For the People Act of 2021, at the Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, March 3, 2021.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

The stakes are monumental, cutting to the foundational idea that one person equals one vote, and could shape election outcomes for years to come. It also offers a test of how

hard President Joe Biden and his party are willing to fight for their priorities, as well as those of their voters. The measure, which was all but certain to pass the House in a vote expected Wednesday, has been a

pressing issue for Democrats since they won their majority in 2018. But it has taken on added urgency in the wake of Donald Trump's repeated false claims of a stolen 2020 election.

Courts and even Trump's last attorney general, William Barr, found his claims about the election to be without merit. But, spurred on by those lies, state lawmakers across the U.S. have filed more than 200 bills in 43 states that would limit ballot access, according to a tally kept by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

In Iowa, the legislature has voted to cut absentee and in-person early voting and prevent local elections officials from setting up additional locations to make early voting easier. In Georgia, the House on Monday voted for a law to require

identification to vote by mail and allow counties to cancel early in-person voting on Sundays, when many Black voters cast ballots after church.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court appeared ready to uphold voting restrictions in Arizona, which could make it harder to challenge state election laws in the future. When asked why proponents sought to uphold the Arizona laws, which limit who can turn in absentee ballots and enable ballots to be thrown out if they are cast in the wrong precinct, a lawyer for the state's Republican Party was stunningly clear.

"Because it puts us at a competitive disadvantage relative to Democrats," said attorney Michael Carvin. "Politics is a zero-sum game." Battle lines are quickly being drawn by outside groups who plan to spend millions of dollars on advertising and outreach campaigns.

Republicans "are not even being coy about it. They are saying the 'quiet parts' out loud," said Tiffany Muller, the president of End Citizens United, a left-leaning group that aims to curtail the influence of corporate money in politics. Her group has launched a \$10 million effort supporting the bill. "For them, this isn't about protecting our democracy or protecting our elections. This is about pure partisan political gain."

That's the same charge Republicans level at Democrats.

"Democrats want to use their razor-thin majority not to pass bills to earn voters' trust, but to ensure they don't lose more seats in the next election," House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy said from the House floor on Tuesday.

So what's actually in the bill?

H.R. 1 would require states

to automatically register eligible voters, as well as offer same-day registration. It would limit states' ability to purge registered voters from their rolls and mandate the restoration of former felons' voting rights. Among dozens of other provisions, it would also mandate 15 days of early voting and allow no-excuse absentee balloting. On the cusp of a once-in-a-decade redrawing of congressional district boundaries, typically a fiercely partisan affair, the bill would put nonpartisan commissions in control instead of state legislatures.

Many Republican opponents in Congress have homed in on narrower aspects of the measure though, railing against the creation of a public financing system for congressional campaigns.

Davis charged that it would "launder corporate dollars" to publicly fund congressional campaigns. What the bill would actually do is use fines and settlement proceeds raised from corporate bad actors to create a pool of money open to candidates who meet certain requirements.

Republicans similarly attacked an effort to revamp the federal government's toothless elections cop. That agency, the Federal Election Commission, has been gripped by partisan deadlock for years, allowing campaign finance law violators to go mostly unchecked.

Another section that's been a focus of Republican ire would force the disclosure of donors to "dark money" political groups, which are attractive to wealthy interests that wish to remain anonymous.

It "would put people's private information on display and put their personal security at risk," said Rep. Debbie Lesko, R-Ariz. □

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U.S. infrastructure gets C- from engineers as roads stagnate

By HOPE YEN

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) —

America's infrastructure has scored near-failing grades for its deteriorating roads, public transit and storm water systems due to years of inaction from the federal government, the American Society of Civil Engineers reports. Its overall grade: a mediocre C-.

In its "Infrastructure Report Card" released Wednesday, the group called for "big and bold" relief, estimating it would cost \$5.9 trillion over the next decade to bring roads, bridges and airports to a safe and sustainable level. That's about \$2.6 trillion more than what government and the private sector already spend.

"America's infrastructure is not functioning as it should, and families are losing thousands of dollars a year in disposable income as a result of cities having to fix potholes, people getting stuck in traffic or due to repairs when a water line breaks or the energy grid goes down," said Greg DiLoreto, one of the group's past presidents.

"It's critical we take action now," he said, expressing optimism that the federal government is now making it a "top priority."

During Donald Trump's four years in the White House, his administration often held "Infrastructure Week" events and touted transportation improvements. But it was not able to push Congress to pass any broad plan to update the nation's roads and bridges, rails and airports.

The overall C- grade on America's infrastructure



In this Jan. 14, 2021, file photo, a pickup traverses the Franklin Street bridge in Michigan City, Ind. Associated Press

— reflecting a "mediocre" condition with "significant deficiencies" — is a slight improvement from its D+ grade in 2017. The group cited in part state and local government and private-sector efforts, which have turned to new technology to pinpoint water main leaks and prioritize fixes.

But of the 17 categories making up the overall grade, 11 were in the D range that indicated a "significant deterioration" with a "strong risk of failure." They included public transit, storm water infrastructure, airports and roads and highways, which make up the biggest chunk of U.S. infrastructure spending at \$1.6 trillion, according to the group.

Four areas got Cs: bridges, which dropped from a C+ to a C in 2021, energy, drinking water and solid waste. Just two areas — ports and

rail — scored higher, with a B- and B, respectively.

President Joe Biden's administration and lawmakers in recent weeks have begun laying the groundwork for a long-sought boost to the nation's roads, bridges and other infrastructure of \$2 trillion or more, to be unveiled after Congress approves legislation on COVID-19 relief. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who has been meeting with lawmakers about the effort, has said the aim would be to rejuvenate the post-coronavirus pandemic economy and boost crumbling roads and bridges while encouraging alternative forms of transportation to cars, as well as create thousands of green jobs by making environmentally friendly retrofits and public works improvements.

"This report card is a warn-

ing and a call to action," Buttigieg told The Associated Press. "A generation of disinvestment is catching up to us, and we must choose whether to allow our global competitors to pull ahead permanently, or to invest in the safety, equity, resilience and economic strength that superior infrastructure can bring to Americans."

Buttigieg announced on Tuesday the first low-cost federal transportation loan in the Biden administration, up to \$448 million to Texas for toll-road projects in Austin to ease congestion, touting bike-friendly features such as a planned 10-foot-wide paved sidewalk for cyclists and pedestrians with access to trails.

"As communities across the country continue to battle the pandemic, we are committed to being a partner to help them save mon-

ey, reduce congestion and improve mobility, safety, and accessibility," said Buttigieg, a former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, who will address the engineers group later Wednesday.

In its report card, the group said years of inaction has had consequences. It cited growing costs being passed along to consumers as cities and states grapple with funding shortages to fix roads and bridges and delay other major upgrades to infrastructure.

The nation's weak infrastructure has been a problem for communities, including Texas' recent struggles with power outages and water shortages after a brutal winter storm. Unusually frigid conditions led to frozen pipes that burst and flooded homes, and millions of residents lost heat and running water.

According to the report card, the nation is only paying about half of what it needs to lift overall U.S. infrastructure to an acceptable "B" level. Left unaddressed, America's overdue infrastructure bill by 2039 will cost the average American household \$3,300 a year, or \$63 a week, the group said.

It urged strong leadership, greater investment and "new approaches," such as taking into account the reality of climate change in longer-term capital improvement plans.

"Big and bold action from Washington, as well as continued prioritization by states and localities, is needed to bring all our infrastructure to a state of good repair," the report card said. □

California city believed 1st in US to ban new gas stations

PETALUMA, Calif. (AP) — A Northern California city has become what's believed to be the first in the country to ban all new gas stations in an effort to curb carbon emissions.

The Petaluma City Council voted unanimously Monday to prohibit the creation, expansion, reconstruction and relocation of gas stations, encouraging owners to transition to stations that serve

electric and hydrogen-powered vehicles, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

The city of 58,000 people 40 miles (64 kilometers) north of San Francisco hopes to become carbon neutral by 2030.

"We need to do our part to help mitigate and adapt to our changing weather patterns that exist because of all the carbon we put in the atmosphere," Councilwoman

D'Lynda Fischer, who spearheaded the initiative, said Tuesday.

"I hope other cities will follow suit, and if they have existing fossil fuel stations that satisfy the needs of their community, they too will decide that they don't need any more," Fischer said.

Petaluma has 16 gas stations, with one more expected to be built as part of a grocery store. It had been approved before the vote.

The measure is happening in a state that's been a leader in fighting climate change. In 2018, former Gov. Jerry Brown signed an executive order intended to get California carbon neutral by 2045. Last year, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced that the sale of new gas-powered vehicles would be banned starting in 2035. The Petaluma resolution will take effect 30 days after the council's approval.

Study: Employment rose among those in free money experiment

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)

— After getting \$500 per month for two years without rules on how to spend it, 125 people in California paid off debt, got full-time jobs and had "statistically significant improvements" in emotional health, according to a study released Wednesday.

The program was the nation's highest-profile experiment in decades of universal basic income, an idea that was revived as a major part of Andrew Yang's 2020 campaign for president.

The idea is to bring people out of poverty with a guaranteed monthly income. Supporters say it gives people needed financial security to find good jobs and avoid debt. But critics have argued free money would eliminate the incentive to work, creating a society dependent on the state. The Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration sought to test those claims. Run by a nonprofit founded by former Stockton Mayor Michael Tubbs, the program included people who lived in census tracts at or below the city's median household income of \$46,033.

The program did not use tax dollars, but was financed by private donations, including a nonprofit led by Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes.

A pair of independent re-



In this Aug. 14, 2019, file photo, then-Stockton Mayor Michael Tubbs speaks during an interview in Stockton, Calif.

searchers at the University of Tennessee and the University of Pennsylvania reviewed data from the first year of the study, which did not overlap with the pandemic. A second study looking at year two is scheduled to be released next year.

When the program started in February 2019, 28% of the people slated to get the free money had full-time jobs. One year later, 40% of those people had full-time jobs. A control group of people who did not get the money saw a 5 percentage point increase in full-time employment over that

same time period, from 32% to 37%.

"These numbers were incredible. I hardly believed them myself," said Stacia West, a researcher at the University of Tennessee who analyzed the data along with Amy Castro Baker at the University of Pennsylvania.

The researchers said that the extra \$500 per month was enough for people with part-time jobs to take time off so they could interview for full-time jobs that offered better pay. They also said the money could have helped people who weren't working at all find

jobs by allowing them to pay for transportation to interviews.

After a year of getting the money, 62% of the people were paying off debt compared to 52% before the study. Researchers also said most people moved from being likely to have mild mental health disorders to "likely mental wellness."

People got the money once a month on a debit card, which let researchers track how most of the people spent it. The biggest category each month was food, followed by sales and merchandise, which included purchases at places like

Walmart and Target, which also sell groceries. The next highest categories were utilities, auto and services. Less than 1% of the money went to tobacco and alcohol. Universal basic income has been a popular idea among California's tech titans as they grapple with how to handle the inevitable job losses that will come with breakthroughs in automation and artificial intelligence. They found an ideal place to test the idea in Stockton, about 75 miles (120 kilometers) northeast of Silicon Valley and once known as the foreclosure capital of the U.S. at the height of the Great Recession a decade ago.

Tubbs, who at the time was Stockton's first Black mayor, was eager to try it.

Not everyone was on board with the idea. Aside from conservatives who dislike big government programs, opposition also comes from labor unions that worry about what other types of social safety net programs would have to be sacrificed to pay for a guaranteed income. It could cost nearly \$3 trillion a year to provide a guaranteed income to everyone.

"What these experiments don't tell us is what the impact would be as a result of the tradeoffs that are necessary to implement UBI on a massive scale," said Steve Smith, communications director for the California Labor Federation. □

Police: Live pipe bomb found at polling place in Iowa



Ankeny Police investigate the scene at the Lakeside Center where a suspicious package was found on Tuesday, March 2, 2021, in Ankeny, Iowa.

Associated Press

ANKENY, Iowa (AP) — The discovery of a live pipe

bomb at a central Iowa polling place as voters were casting ballots in a special election forced an evacuation of the building, police said.

Officers called to the Lakeside Center in Ankeny around 9:30 a.m. Tuesday found a device that looked like a pipe bomb in grass near the center. Police later confirmed in a news release that the device was a pipe bomb.

The banquet hall was being used as a polling place for an Ankeny school district special election. Police

evacuated the building, and the State Fire Marshal and agents with the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were called in. Technicians safely detonated the device, and the center was reopened around 12:30 p.m. — about three hours after the device was discovered, police said. No one was injured.

Polk County Auditor Jamie Fitzgerald described the device as a metal piece with two end caps, and said in a Twitter post that a couple walking their dog

Tuesday morning had discovered the device.

"I want to also add that there is no way of knowing how long this device had been at the Lakeside Center," Fitzgerald said in a tweet, saying officials don't know whether the pipe bomb was related to the election.

Fitzgerald and police said other polling places in Ankeny were checked and no other bombs or suspicious devices were found. An investigation into who left the device is continuing, police said. □

Man who used van to kill 10 pedestrians in Toronto guilty

By ROB GILLIES

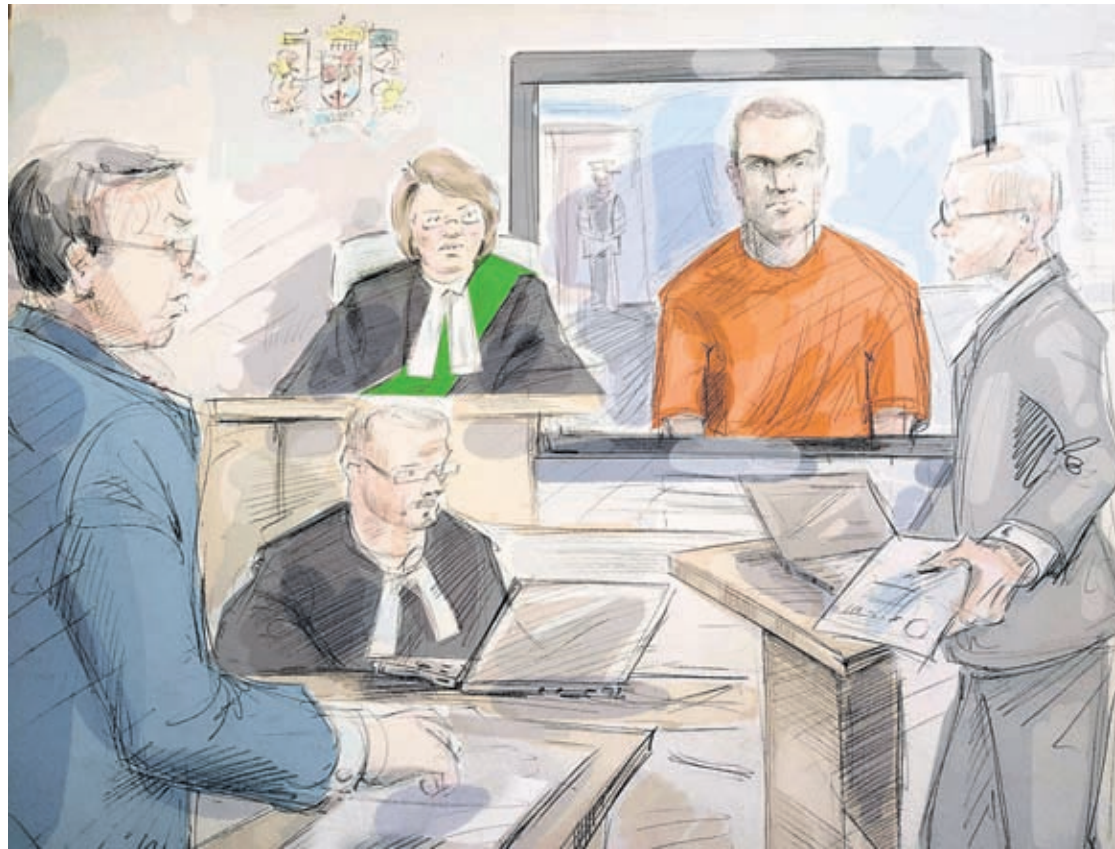
Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — A man who admitted using a van to kill 10 pedestrians in Toronto was found guilty on Wednesday in a case that drew attention to an online world of sexual loneliness, rage and misogyny.

Alek Minassian faced 10 counts of first-degree murder and 16 counts of attempted murder in connection with the April 23, 2018, attack.

Minassian, 28, told police he belonged to an online community of sexually frustrated men, some of whom have plotted attacks on people who have sex. He admitted to police that he drove a rental van into crowds of pedestrians in a busy north Toronto neighborhood. Eight women and two men ranging in age from 22 to 94 died.

His lawyer argued he didn't know what he was doing was wrong because he has autism spectrum disorder, angering advocates for the rights of autistic individuals. Minassian had pleaded not guilty and his lawyer argued his client was not criminally responsible.



In this May 10, 2018 file photo of a courtroom sketch, from left, defense lawyer Boris Bytensky, Justice Ruby Wong, Alek Minassian and Crown prosecutor Joe Callaghan are shown in court as Minassian appears by video in Toronto, Canada.

Justice Anne Molloy said his lawyers failed to prove he was not criminally responsible. She said there is no doubt his actions were planned and deliberate and that he was fully aware of what he was doing.

"His attack on these 26 vic-

tims that day was an act of a reasoning mind," Molloy said.

"It does not matter that he does not have remorse, nor empathize with the victims. Lack of empathy for the suffering of victims, even an incapacity to empathize

for whatever reason, does not constitute a defense."

The judge noted the man sought and enjoyed notoriety from his actions. She did not name the accused in her decision, referring to him as "John Doe" and said she hopes that he will

no longer be named.

The verdict was livestreamed on YouTube because of the pandemic. He faces an automatic life sentence with no parole for at least 25 years. Sentencing will be at a later date.

Minassian, who said he never had a girlfriend and was a virgin, rented the van and admitted to police he used the van as a weapon and said he wanted to inspire more attacks.

He called himself an "incel," short for "involuntary celibate," an online subculture that has been linked to other attacks in California and Florida and that often promotes the idea men are entitled to have sex with women. Minassian claimed to police he was in contact with Elliot Rodger, a community college student who killed six people and wounded 13 in shooting and stabbing attacks in 2014 near the University of California, Santa Barbara, before apparently shooting himself to death.

"Nearly three years ago, our entire city was rocked by this heinous act of violence," Toronto Mayor John Tory said in a statement. □

Associated Press

Health minister condemns blast at Dutch virus test center

By MIKE CORDER

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A blast caused by a "homemade device"

smashed windows at a coronavirus testing center in a small Dutch town early

Wednesday, police said. Nobody was hurt in the explosion, which was condemned by the government and health officials. "For more than a year, we've been leaning heavily on the people on the

front line. And then this. Crazy," Health Minister Hugo de Jonge tweeted. The head of the country's umbrella organization for local health services that carry out coronavirus testing called the blast a "cowardly act."

"Our people have to be able to do this crucial work safely," Andre Rouvoet tweeted.

Police in the province of North Holland said in a statement that forensic investigations revealed that the blast was caused by a "homemade device" that exploded close to the glass façade of the test center in Bovenkarspel just before 7 a.m. Police cordoned off the area, which is 60 kilometers (40 miles) north of Amsterdam, to investigate.

Police spokesman Menno

Hartenberg said earlier that it was clear that the explosive device didn't "get there by accident. But we have no idea at the moment who exactly left it there and what the intention was."

Police said a metal cylinder that had exploded was found outside the building.

The northern regions of North Holland province have been identified as a virus hotspot in recent weeks, with infection numbers higher than the national average.

In January, rioters torched a coronavirus test facility in the fishing village of Urk on the first night of a 9 p.m.-to-4:30 a.m. nationwide curfew imposed as part of the government's latest coronavirus lockdown.

Attacks on health work-

ers and facilities around the world have increased amid the COVID-19 pandemic. A new report by the Geneva-based Insecurity Insight and the University of California, Berkeley's Human Rights Center identified more than 1,100 such threats or acts of violence last year.

Some Dutch lockdown restrictions were relaxed Wednesday with hairdressers, masseurs and other "contact professions" allowed to reopen if they adhere to strict social distancing and hygiene measures.

Nonessential shops also were allowed to reopen in the Netherlands for the first time since mid-December, though only to very limited numbers of customers who make an appointment in advance. □



Emergency services attend the scene close to a coronavirus test station after a homemade firework was detonated in Bovenkarspel, Netherlands, Wednesday March 3, 2021.

Associated Press

ICC launches war crimes probe into Israeli practices

By **JOSEF FEDERMAN and MIKE CORDER**

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor on Wednesday launched an investigation into alleged crimes in the Palestinian territories, turning the tribunal's focus toward Israeli military actions and settlement construction on lands captured in the 1967 Mid-east war.

The decision dealt an embarrassing blow to the Israeli government, which had conducted an aggressive public relations and behind-the-scenes diplomatic campaign to block the investigation. It also raised the possibility of arrest warrants being issued against Israeli officials suspected of war crimes, making it potentially risky to travel abroad.

"The state of Israel is under attack this evening," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a videotaped statement. "The biased international court in the Hague made a decision that is the essence of anti-Semitism and hypocrisy."

"I promise you we will fight for the truth until we annual this scandalous decision," he said.

The decision by Fatou Bensouda, the court's outgoing prosecutor, had been expected since the court determined last month that she had jurisdiction over the case. A preliminary probe by Bensouda in 2019 had found a "reasonable basis" to open a war crimes case. In a statement, Bensouda said the investigation will look into "crimes within the jurisdiction of the court that are alleged to have been committed" since June 13, 2014. She said the investigation will be conducted "independently, impartially and objectively, without fear or favor." That task will now be handed to Karim Khan, the British lawyer who is set to become the court's chief prosecutor in June.

Wednesday's decision turns the court's focus toward two key Israeli policies of recent years: its repeated military operations against



In this Nov. 7, 2019 file photo, the International Criminal Court, or ICC, is seen in The Hague, Netherlands.

Associated Press

Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip, highlighted by a devastating 2014 war, and its expansion of Jewish settlements in east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank. Experts say that Israel could be especially vulnerable to prosecution for its settlement policies.

Although the Palestinians do not have an independent state, they were granted nonmember observer status in the U.N. General Assembly in 2012, allowing them to join international organizations like the ICC. Since joining the court in 2015, they have pushed for a war crimes probe against Israel. Israel, which is not a member of the court, had said it does not have jurisdiction because Palestine is not a sovereign state.

The Palestinian Authority, which administers autonomous areas in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, welcomed Wednesday's move.

"This long-awaited step serves Palestine's vigorous effort to achieve justice and accountability as indispensable bases for peace," the Palestinian Foreign Ministry said.

The Palestinians chose June 2014 as the start of the investigation to coincide with the run-up to Israel's devastating Gaza war that summer.

In the fighting, over 2,200

Palestinians, including nearly 1,500 civilians, were killed by Israeli fire, according to U.N. estimates. At least 67 soldiers and six civilians were killed on the Israeli side, according to Israeli figures.

Israel has argued that it waged a war of self-defense against nonstop rocket fire against its cities. It blames Gaza's Islamic militant Hamas rulers for the high civilian death toll because the group launched attacks from residential areas, drawing Israeli retaliation.

Bensouda has also said her probe would look into the actions of Hamas, which fired rockets indiscriminately into Israel during the 2014 war.

In Gaza, Hamas nonetheless welcomed the initiation of the investigation and called on Bensouda to "resist any pressure" that could scuttle the process.

"This is a step forward to implement justice, punish the occupation and do justice to the Palestinian people," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem told the Associated Press. He said he was confident that the rocket attacks on Israeli cities was legitimate under international law.

The ICC is meant to serve as a court of last resort when countries' own judicial systems are unable or

unwilling to investigate and prosecute war crimes.

Israel does not recognize its authority, saying it has an independent, world-class judicial system. But the Palestinians, and human rights groups, say Israel is incapable of investigating itself and has a history of white-washing military crimes.

After the war, the military opened dozens of investigations into the conduct of troops. Although there were only a handful of convictions on minor charges, that could be enough for the court, which dropped a similar case against British troops in Iraq last year because U.K. authorities had investigated.

In a reference to Israel's justice system, Bensouda said the investigation will "allow for a continuing assessment of actions being taken at the domestic level in accordance with the principle of complementarity."

Experts have warned that Israel could have a harder time defending its settlement policies in in east Jerusalem and the West Bank. Settlements are widely viewed as illegal based on the Geneva Convention principle that an occupying power is barred from transferring its population to territories captured in war. Population transfers are listed as a war crime in the ICC's founding treaty,

the Rome Statute.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem after the 1967 Mid-east war, and considers the West Bank disputed territory. But its positions are not internationally recognized, and most of the world considers both areas occupied territories.

Today, some 700,000 settlers live in the two areas, which the Palestinians claim, along with Gaza, for a future state. Israel says the fate of these areas should be resolved in negotiations, and that ICC involvement will push the Palestinians away from the negotiating table.

Bensouda said that priorities in the investigation will be "determined in due time" based on constraints including the coronavirus pandemic, limited resources and prosecutors' existing heavy workload.

While Wednesday's decision does not pose any immediate threat to Israel, the court has the authority to quietly issue arrest warrants for people suspected of crimes.

Netanyahu was prime minister during the 2014 Gaza war and has been a strong advocate of the settlements. His defense minister, Benny Gantz, was Israel's military commander during the war. Israeli media have said that Israel is in touch with allies who are members of the ICC to receive warnings about potential arrest warrants against its citizens.

In his statement, Netanyahu said Israel was being unfairly singled out. He accused the court of "turning a blind eye to Iran, Syria and the other dictatorships that are committing real war crimes."

International human rights groups praised the decision as a step toward justice for Israeli and Palestinian victims. "The court's crowded docket shouldn't deter the prosecutor's office from doggedly pursuing cases against anyone credibly implicated in such crimes," said Balkees Jarrah, associate international justice director at Human Rights Watch. □

Guatemala begins reshaping court; corruption concerns grow

By SONIA PÉREZ D.

Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) —

Guatemala's Congress began reshaping the country's highest court Tuesday, selecting a new magistrate and an alternate in decisions that could have grave consequences for the battle against corruption and impunity.

In an initial vote Tuesday, current magistrate Dina Ochoa received a majority of votes (101 of 160 lawmakers), putting her on a path to a likely second consecutive term. She was originally former President Jimmy Morales' pick to the current court. Ochoa has been criticized for decisions to protect a fugitive judge accused of corruption and to eject the United Nations anti-corruption mission, known as CICIG.

Selecting the new members of the Constitutional Court has roiled Guatemalan politics since last year. The congressional selections Tuesday were the first of a series of sectors charged with picking the new court.

The court decides almost



In this Aug. 27, 2017 file photo, Constitutional Court President Jose Francisco de Mata Vela leads a press conference in Guatemala City.

all of the most contentious political, judicial and criminal issues that arise in Guatemala and the outgoing court was seen as an important bulwark against some of the most ill-intentioned legal maneuvers. The members will hold their seats for five years and the selection process has been

filled with accusations of collusion and corruption. The stakes are so high because the next court will likely decide the fate of politicians accused of corruption like former President Otto Pérez Molina, military officers convicted of crimes against humanity and the potential candidacy of

Zury Ríos, daughter of ex-dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, constitutionally banned from running.

The Constitutional Court is the last step in Guatemala's justice system, so the selection process has drawn the attention of not only Guatemalans, but outsiders concerned with the

rule of law in the country. Tuesday's votes were preceded by a handful of arrest orders last week against people directly involved in the process, though for meddling in the selection of judges on other courts.

The court is made up of five magistrates and five alternates. The congress picks a magistrate and alternate Tuesday and then Guatemala's bar association, public university council, president and Supreme Court pick the remaining members.

Activists, lawyers and other observers have widely criticized the process already for attempts to manipulate the results, influence peddling and other alleged crimes. □

Last week, Guatemalan authorities requested arrest orders for several people involved in the selection of magistrates or candidates to the court. One was for the rector of University of San Carlos de Guatemala, Murphy Paíz, one of those who would help choose new Constitutional Court members, for allegedly colluding on votes. □

Associated Press

Yemen's rebels say latest U.S. sanctions will prolong the war

By SAMY MAGDY

Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Yemen's Iran-backed rebels Wednesday warned that the U.S. sanctions imposed

the previous day on two of their military leaders would only prolong the conflict in the impoverished Arab country. President Joe Biden's administration on

Tuesday slapped sanctions on two Houthi leaders, citing their alleged roles in cross-border attacks on Saudi Arabia and shipping vessels in the Red Sea. Rebel leaders Mansour al-Saadi and Ahmed al-Hamzi were responsible for attacks "impacting Yemeni civilians, bordering nations, and commercial vessels in international waters," the departments of State and Treasury said. They said the Houthis play "a significant role in the conflict in Yemen and exacerbate the dire humanitarian plight of the Yemeni people."

Mohammed Abdul-Salam, a spokesman for the Houthis, said the sanctions show the U.S. "does not attempt to stop the aggression and lift the siege on Yemen." □



Yemeni men walk amid the graves of Houthi fighters who were killed during recent fighting, at a cemetery in Sanaa, Yemen, Tuesday, Mar. 2, 2021.

Associated Press

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Website: www.pinchosaruba.com

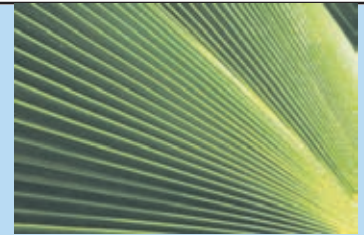
Travellers' Choice 2020

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Travellers' Choice 2020

LOCAL



Medlab Aruba 'fit-2-fly': Covid-19 testing on the island



NOORD — While on vacation, the last thing you need to worry about is what to do or where to go for your COVID-19 testing. Many countries, including the U.S. require for all passengers heading back home to present with a negative test result for PCR or Antigen 72 hours prior to departure.

MEDLAB Aruba is an accredited ISO 15189:2012 OGA-LE 23-08 laboratory with over 30 years of experience on the island. The laboratory complies with the Department of Public Health of Aruba, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) requirements for COVID -19 testing. MEDLAB Aruba

has been assigned as one of the private laboratories authorized to perform "Fit-2-Fly" testing for departing passengers.

Hassle free scheduling – QR-code

The laboratory has invested on the only fully integrated digital booking platform on the island that allows guests to pre-register for the testing prior to coming to Aruba and have all their information incorporated upon entry to any of the available testing centers. Guests will receive a confirmation email with QR-code that will be requested upon day of testing to facilitate a faster turnaround time for your results.



Testing options

Offering three method of testing gives you, our island visitors, the possibility to choose which service is at your convenience. Recommended time to complete test prior to departure is 48 (72) hours. We also request for you to bring your passport to the appointment.

Testing Option 1: Walk-In service at our location in Noord Medical Center (NMC), Noord 63 or at Superfood COVID Testing Center. You may also book online at WWW.COVIDARUBA.COM and choose location.

Testing Option 2: On-site at participating hotels. Only guests staying on these properties will be allowed to conduct the test. Appointment is also made online at WWW.COVIDARUBA.COM.

The participating hotels with testing facilities are Aruba Marriott Resort (Stellaris, Ocean and Surf Club), Holiday Inn, Playa Linda Beach Resort, RIU Antillas, RIU Palace, Eagle Resort, Costa Linda Beach Resort, Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, Manchebo Beach Resort, Casa del Mar & Aruba Beach Club, Caribbean Palm Village.

Testing Option 3: Airbnb/ Other hotel location. We come to you for the test together with our vehicular Mobile Health Test Unit. We require a minimum of six people for this service. Request/ Book appointment through WhatsApp number +297 5975548.

Price

Offering a great rate for the testing. The Antigen test is at \$50 and the PCR at \$100. Payment method is card (preferred), cash (hygiene measures).

The COVID Test is not covered by the Aruba Visitor's Insurance, but you are able to seek reimbursement once back home.

Results

Turn-around time for results is within 24 hours. Result is sent electronically to your email (check spam/ junk folder)

For more information visit www.covidaruba.com, call us at +297 5975548 or email us at covid@lab.aw.



Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation. Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received an extraordinary story from **Cassy and Jamie Brockway** from Steubenville Ohio. They wrote:
"We love putting our feet in the sand of Eagle Beach, playing in the Beautiful blue water, and snorkeling for turtles. We love Aruba". □



Business sentiments improved in the fourth quarter of 2020

ORANJESTAD — The Central Bank of Aruba (CBA) recently concluded its Business Perception Survey (BPS) for the fourth quarter of 2020. The BPS assesses the economic perceptions and sentiments of local businesses as well as the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic conditions and business activities.

The Business Perception Index (BPI), comprising the current and short-term economic conditions, rose by 2.6 index points to 95.9 during the fourth quarter of 2020. The overall BPI remains pessimistic despite an improvement in sentiments, compared to last quarter (See Chart 1). The positive in sentiments resulted from an improved perception on both current and short-term future economic conditions.

Chart 1: Business Perception Index



The current economic condition index noted an expansion of 1.1 index points to 93.4, up from 92.3 in the third quarter of 2020. The short-term future economic condition index grew significantly by 6.2 index points, i.e., from 94.9 in the third quarter of 2020 to 101.1 in the fourth quarter of 2020 (See Table 1). The percentage of respondents expecting negative economic growth in the next 12 months, dropped by 12.4 percentage points to 57.8 percent.

In terms of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the expanded Business Perception Survey also assessed its expected impact on business sales, the need for applying for emergency business funds, and the anticipated views on economic effect.

More than 40 percent of the respondents (44.0 percent) pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a significant impact on their business sales, i.e., 2.5 percentage points more compared to the third quarter. The complete report of the Business Perception Survey is available on the website of the CBA (<https://www.cba-ruba.org/>). □

Table 1: Business Perception Survey (General results)

	Q4-2020		
	Improvement (%)	No change (%)	Worsening (%)
A. Current economic condition	13.9	17.1	69.0
1. The economic conditions in Aruba	3.8	7.6	88.6
2. The activities of your business	6.3	17.7	75.9
3. The investments of your business	13.9	26.6	59.5
4. The number of employees that work for your company	31.6	16.5	51.9
B. Expected short-term economic conditions	22.5	59.5	18.0
1. The economic conditions in Aruba	29.1	44.3	26.6
2. The activities of your business	27.8	58.2	13.9
3. The investments of your business	21.5	60.8	17.7
4. The number of employees that work for your company	11.4	74.7	13.9

Source: Centrale Bank of Aruba

Distinguished visitors honored at Costa Linda Beach Resort

EAGLE BEACH—Recently, Kimberley Richardson of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor Aruba's loyal and friendly visitors as Distinguished Visitors of Aruba. The Distinguished visitor certificate is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba 10 years and more consecutively.

The honorees were **Mr. David Lynch & Mrs. Diane Lynch** from USA.

These wonderful people stated that they love the island very much, especially for its year-round sunny weather, nice sandy beaches and picturesque sunsets, delicious variety of foods, its safety and Aruba's warm and friendly people who be-



came like family to them.

Richardson together with the representatives of the Costa Linda Beach Resort presented the certificates to the honorees, handed

over some presents and also thanked them for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination and as their home-away-from-home. □

Prohibited by law:

Tourist leaving the island with seashells, white sand and corals



ORANJESTAD — For the last months the customs department at the airport intercepted many tourists leaving the island with seashells, white sand and corals as souvenirs.

Conform the international treaty

of CITES and our local law which protects our Flora & Fauna, it is completely prohibited to take any seashell, sand and coral outside of Aruba, this in order to protect our environment. The high amount of seashell, sand and corals confiscated is very strange and it is suspected that our own locals are the once selling these to the tourists, which is unacceptable.

Upon confiscation at the airport the tourist also faces a fine that they have to pay before leaving. This is surely not a pleasant experience for the tourist. This also leads to a negative reaction which can put our tourism in a negative light.

Let's all give nature the respect it deserves by protecting our environment. Stop collecting seashells,



white sand and corals from our shores and stop selling these to our tourist. We want our future genera-

tions and visitors to enjoy the beauty of our beaches, shells and corals. Let's all protect what is ours! □

Another Treasure of Aruba's Beaches: Sea Glass!

NOORD - It is hard to imagine this happening today, but years ago people dumped all kinds of refuse straight into the ocean, including old cars, and their household garbage, which of course included lots of glass. Over the next 30 years the pounding waves cleaned the beach, by breaking down everything but glass and pottery. The pounding waves washed the trash up and down, back and forth. Tons of polished, broken glass pieces were created by the pounding surf. These smoothened, colored glass particles then settled along the sea shore in millions, and that is why you can find these beautiful and colorful pieces on the north shore beaches of Aruba.



Especially on the strip on white sand between the famous Natural Bridge" and the huge red anchor close to "Grapefield" beach you will be able to find your own pieces of sea glass. The sea

glass that was created is the product of a very long and interesting process. It can take anywhere from 10 to 30 years to make sea glass.

The name for any piece of glass that finds its way to the ocean and tumbles around in the water long enough is "Sea glass.

The colorful pieces of glass are being used for decoration, handcrafts and jewelry!

Once glass makes its way into the ocean, the glass is broken up into shards and is tumbled around in the water, where sand and other rocks act like sandpaper to smooth out its rough edges. Sometimes as the sea glass is passed through fire, it be-

comes fire glass, the rarest of sea glass with certain inclusions, just like precious gems.

For years, the water beat against the different kinds of trash being dumped. Glass, household appliances and even motor parts were discarded on the beach. The waves and weather conditions wore down the overwhelming amount of garbage in the water, creating millions of beautiful smooth rocks.

It's hard to believe the short-sighted mistakes we were making that could have potentially ruined these beautiful beaches. But thanks to natural processes, the ocean transformed the trash into the sea glass.

Each colored gem on the beach has its own story. The ruby red glass stones are typically from old car tail-lights.

Then, the sapphire rocks are the remnants of broken apothecary bottles. The most common and the easiest to find are the brown (Amstel & Polar

beer), green (Heineken & Balashi beer) and clear glass which are the soft much loved "soft drink" bottles.

If you like to see the sea glass for yourself, and be in awe of the power of nature, rent a car or jeep and go explore our deserted beaches on the north side of the island. Make it a fun family day!

Even if we didn't mean to pollute the Beaches how we did, it is inspiring to see just how the earth can correct our mistakes.

Funny, how trash can change into treasures!

Everybody knows that you are not allowed to take local shells home, but the people working at the airport have no problem you taking sea glass home. A few of those pieces make great souvenirs. You can place them in a wine glass or large bottle for decoration and every time you look at it a smile will light up your face thinking back of your unforgettable Aruba vacation! □



Your credit report may be wrong; here's what to do about it

By **BEV O'SHEA** of NerdWallet

Consumers filed complaints with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau in record numbers in 2020, according to a report released Monday by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, a nonprofit consumer advocacy group. Credit reporting issues were cited in 282,000, or 63%, of the complaints. The majority noted "incorrect information" on credit reports or "information belongs to someone else," the report said.

Not only did complaints about credit report errors lead the list of consumer grievances, but the three major credit-reporting bureaus — Experian, TransUnion and Equifax — were the top three companies complained about.

ERRORS CAN ENDANGER YOUR SCORE

Accuracy matters since credit report errors can suggest identity theft or fraudulent activity on your accounts. And because credit report data provides the raw material for credit scores, errors can lower your score. Some of the volume of complaints may be an unintended conse-



In this March 5, 2012 file photo, consumer credit cards are posed in North Andover, Mass.

Associated Press

quence of payment accommodations mandated by the 2020 coronavirus relief bill and temporary concessions offered by lenders and credit card issuers.

But credit report errors were common even before the pandemic, says Ed Mierzewski, senior director of the advocacy group's Federal Consumer Program and author of the report. Payment accommodations may have led more people

to check their credit reports and find those errors, he says. Mierzewski recommends that "any consumer with any credit account" check their credit reports. People who have common names may be at particular risk of a mix-up, he says.

HOW TO GET YOUR FREE CREDIT REPORTS

You can get a free credit report from each of the three major credit bureaus by using AnnualCreditRe-

port.com. You'll be asked to provide personal identifying information — your name, Social Security number, birthdate and address. You will also be asked security questions to verify your identity. Some of those can be tough. If you aren't able to answer correctly, call 877-322-8228 to request your credit reports by mail. You can also download and mail a request form to: Annual Credit Report

Request Service, P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281.

HOW TO READ YOUR CREDIT REPORTS

Your reports from the three bureaus won't look exactly the same. Not every creditor reports to all three and the bureaus present information in different formats. But you can use a similar procedure for reading your credit reports.

First, check your identifying information. Errors such as misspellings of a former employer are unimportant, but something like an address you've never lived at could suggest identity theft.

Next, check account information. Each credit account you have (and some that are closed) should be listed and include:

- Creditor's name, account number and date opened.

- Type of account (credit card, loan, etc.).

- Account status and whether you're current on payments. Accounts that were in good standing when pandemic-related payment accommodations began must continue to be reported that way until the accommodation ends. □

Majority of small businesses not requiring vaccines, tests

By **MIKE SCHNEIDER**

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — A majority of small businesses are not requiring their employees to get tested for the new coronavirus or get any COVID-19 vaccines, though the health care and hospitality industries are ahead of the curve on this requirement, according to a report released this week by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The bureau's most recent Small Business Pulse Survey showed 70% of the small businesses surveyed said "no" when asked if they had required employees to test negative for COVID-19 before coming to work in the last week. Another 10% said "yes" and almost 20% said the question

was not applicable.

Of the small businesses, two sectors, health care and accommodations/food service had higher rates than the national average — respectively 15.5% and 14.3%.

When asked if employees were asked to have proof of COVID-19 vaccination in the past week, 2.2% of the small businesses answered "yes" and 78.4% answered "no," with 19.4% saying it wasn't applicable, according to the survey. However, 62% of small businesses in the health care industry said they were requiring a vaccine, the survey said.

The latest Small Business Pulse Survey is among a series of surveys the Census Bureau has conducted

since last spring to measure the effect of the pandemic. It was conducted February 15-21 when the survey was sent to approximately 100,000 businesses. About 25,000 businesses responded.

The small businesses have less than 500 employees and are in a single location.

The latest survey asked the small businesses what changes they had made to their capital expenditures last year. Almost a quarter of respondents said they had postponed planned spending, 15.6% had decreased expenditures and 12.8% had canceled some spending, the survey said.

When asked about what effect the pandemic has



Bartender Alyssa Dooley makes a cocktail at Mo's Irish Pub, Tuesday, March 2, 2021, in Houston. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott announced Tuesday that he is lifting business capacity limits and the state's mask mandate starting next week.

Associated Press

had on their businesses overall, responses by the small businesses were relatively unchanged over the past three months. Around 44% say it has had a moderately negative effect, al-

most 30% says it has had a large negative effect, 19% say it has had little to no effect, 5.6% say it has had a moderately positive effect and 1.7% say it has had a large positive effect. □

Google ends sale of ads using individual web tracking data

AP Business Writer

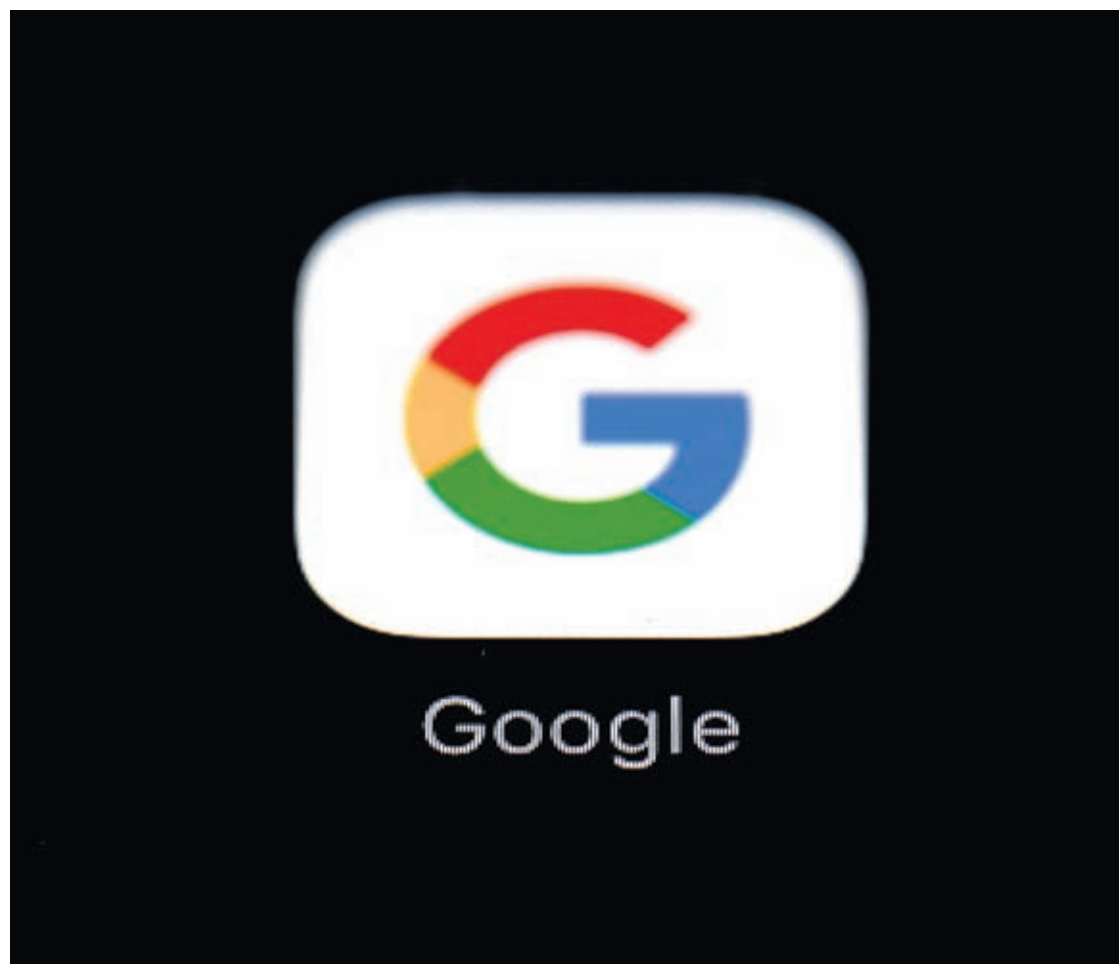
LONDON (AP) — Google says it won't develop new ways to follow individual users across the internet after it phases out existing ad-tracking technology from its Chrome browser, a change that could shake up the online advertising industry.

Google says it's taking the move to protect user privacy. It's part of a broader shift in the industry as marketers such as Apple and regulators in the U.K., U.S. and elsewhere increasingly are seeking ways to phase out more egregious data collection practices.

Still, there are concerns that it will add to the tech giant's already dominant power in online advertising. And the change won't affect Google's largest advertising moneymakers: Search and YouTube.

"There's a growing idea that if you can't persuade consumers to part with their data willingly, you probably don't deserve it," said Brian Wieser, global president of business intelligence at media agency GroupM. "Consumers are more aware of their data being used unwittingly. Brands (thinking long term) are asking 'do you really want to irritate consumers with messages that create a perception of privacy being violated in some form?' No."

The digital giant already said it would remove so-



This March 19, 2018 file photo shows the Google app on an iPad in Baltimore.

Associated Press

called third party cookies from Chrome. Those are snippets of code used by advertisers to record users' web-browsing histories in order to target personalized ads. Third-party cookies have long been a key tool for marketers to deliver targeted ads, but they've also been a source of privacy concerns since they trace users across the Internet in ways they might not be aware of.

On Wednesday, the com-

pany said it won't replace those cookies with another way of tracking individuals. Instead, Google proposes grouping together web users with similar interests and keeping web histories private on user devices. Google can still track users through its own services like Search or Maps.

"If digital advertising doesn't evolve to address the growing concerns people have about their privacy and how their personal identity is being used, we risk the future of the free and open web," David Temkin, Google's director of product management for ads privacy and trust, said in a blog post.

Temkin said the company continues to get questions on whether it will join others in the ad tech industry that plan to replace third-party cookies with alternative user-level identifiers.

"Today, we're making explicit that once third-party cookies are phased out, we will not build alternate identifiers to track individuals as they browse across the web, nor will we use them in our products," he said.

Chrome is the world's domi-

nant web browser, and many rival browsers like Microsoft's Edge are based on Google's Chromium technology.

Even though the changes are aimed at tightening up on privacy, Google will still be able to track users of its own services, said James Rosewell, CEO of Marketers for an Open Web, a group of media and advertising companies lobbying against the changes.

"What they're not saying is that 'people are logged into our products all the time'" and thus give consent to be tracked when they use Search, Maps, Gmail or YouTube, Rosewell said. "What they're not saying is, 'we're going to stop all of that'."

Another key bit of background: Apple is preparing to erect a new barrier to monitoring the activities of more than 1 billion iPhone users online.

Its new privacy tool, expected to roll out in a software update early this spring, will require mobile apps to explicitly ask iPhone users for permission to collect information about what they are doing and where. That safeguard is a change from

Apple's long-held practice of requiring iPhone users to go into settings to block apps from tracking them.

The added privacy protection on iPhones has riled Facebook, which has relied on widespread tracking to build the second most lucrative digital ad network behind Google. Facebook has repeatedly attacked Apple's anti-tracking tool as an attack on small businesses that rely on personalized digital ads to subsidize their mostly free services. It's also suggested that the iPhone maker is mostly interested in forcing more apps to charge consumers for their products so it can collect a 15% to 30% commission in its app store.

Analysts say Facebook stands to lose billions of dollars if most iPhone users don't grant the social network permission to track them.

Google has acknowledged Apple's new privacy tool could decrease the revenue of some apps in its digital ad network but plans to revise its own iPhone apps so they won't be affected by the upcoming changes. Unlike Facebook, Google has a crucial business relationship with Apple. Google pays Apple an estimated \$9 billion to \$12 billion annually to be the default search engine on the iPhone.

Aram Sinnreich, a communication studies professor at American University, said shifting the mechanics of analyzing online behavior and buying patterns away from third-party tracking cookies might make people less vulnerable to privacy abuses, at least for now. It's also in some ways a shot against Facebook, which has publicized a big push for better privacy but remains "really, really dependent on tracking for its business model," he said.

"Apple and Amazon and Google have more diversified business models, where tracking is important but not central," Sinnreich said. "It's a re-envisioning of the digital marketing universe that diminishes Facebook's relative power." □

Conceptis Sudoku
By Dave Green

	1			2			9	
9		5	6		8	7		3
	3						6	
2		6	3		7	9		4
	8			9			2	
1		2	4		3	5		7

Difficulty Level ★★★
3/04

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San Nicolas	584 5000
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American Airlines	582 2700
Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
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33 years later, Eddie Murphy, Arsenio Hall return to Zamunda

By **JAKE COYLE**

AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — When Eddie Murphy made the original "Coming to America," he was, almost indisputably, the funniest man in America.

Murphy was at the very height of his fame, coming off "Beverly Hills Cop II" and the stand-up special "Raw." They were heady times. Arsenio Hall, Murphy's long-time friend and co-star in "Coming to America," remembers them sneaking out during the shoot to a Hollywood nightclub while still dressed as Prince Akeem and his loyal aide Semmi. "We were insane," says Hall.

The '80s, Murphy says, are "all a blur."

"I was so young, all this stuff was happening. You take everything for granted when you're young, how successful I was," Murphy says, speaking by Zoom with a shelf of award statuettes behind him. "Now I take nothing for granted and appreciate everything." Thirty-three years after "Coming to America," Murphy and Hall have returned to Zamunda. The sequel, originally planned to hit theaters last year, was sold due of the pandemic by Paramount Pictures to Amazon, where



Eddie Murphy, left, and Arsenio Hall appear in a scene from "Coming 2 America."

Associated Press

it will begin streaming Friday.

It's an unlikely coda to a blockbuster comedy, one that belongs so completely to the late '80s that even the sequel tries to keep some of that era's spirit. (A few notable R&B and hip-hop groups make cameos.) "Coming 2 America," directed by Craig Brewer, reverses the fish-out-water plot to bring Queens to Zamunda after Akeem learns he fathered a son (Jermaine Fowler) on his first visit to New York.

Some elements have been

updated. There's a plot of female empowerment; Kiki Layne plays Akeem's daughter. At the barber shop, where Murphy and Hall also reprise their characters, the conversation bounces from Teslas to transgender people.

"We had a draft where they had on MAGA hats and they were Republicans," says Murphy. "It was funny but it was like, eh, let's not even go there."

Instead, Murphy and his collaborators — including writers Barry W. Blaustein, David Sheffield and Kenya

Barris — felt the core appeal of "Coming to America" lies in its fairy tale premise.

"This is the only movie I've ever done that had a cult following," says Murphy. "We had totally forgot about 'Coming to America.' Then this movie took on this life in the culture. It became like a cult movie. Lines from the movie became catchphrases. People do the mic drop now. The very first mic drop is Randy Watson from 'Coming to America.'"

"Coming to America" has indeed played a unique

role in culture since 1988. Real-life McDowell's fast-food restaurants — the McDonald's knockoff from the movie — have briefly popped up in Los Angeles and Chicago. Beyoncé and Jay-Z once dressed up as characters from the film for Halloween.

But the John Landis-directed movie was also a massive success on release. It was the second-highest grossing film domestically in 1988 with \$128.2 million in tickets sold — nearly double what "Die Hard" made that year. Globally, it grossed \$288.8 million, or more than \$630 million adjusted for inflation.

To Murphy, that's the movie's legacy.

"'Coming to America' is the first movie in the history of the movies that had an all-Black cast that traveled all around the world," says Murphy. "They don't give a s--- about Selma and Martin Luther King and civil injustice, whatever our story is in America. They don't give a s--- about that around the world."

"It's not about being Black. It's about love and family and tradition and doing the right thing," Murphy adds. "If 'Black Panther' was about the hood, people wouldn't have seen 'Black Panther' all around the world." □

Kayleigh McEnany signs on as Fox News contributor



In this Dec. 2, 2020 file photo, White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany speaks during a briefing at the White House in Washington.

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As widely anticipated, Fox News said Tuesday that it had signed former White House press

secretary Kayleigh McEnany as a contributor to offer commentary on various network programs.

McEnany, former President Donald Trump's final press secretary, didn't speak about her new role during an interview with Fox's Harris Faulkner that aired Tuesday.

It was reported in January that McEnany had disclosed to the U.S. Office of Government Ethics while still in office that she would work for Fox after leaving the White House. Fox said at the time that it had been in discussions with McEnany but had paused them. Before working for Trump, McEnany was a commentator at CNN.

While at the White House, McEnany frequently appeared on Fox News pro-

grams for interviews.

She said Tuesday that her biggest regret at the White House was not being able to hold a briefing outlining all the accomplishments of the Trump administration.

"But after Jan. 6, it just was not tenable," she said.

She said that "everyone in the administration was horrified" by the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, led by a mob of Trump supporters, but she insisted that it did not represent the former president's backers. Asked if she believed Trump bore any responsibility for the riot, she said, "No, I don't."

Trump was impeached by the House on a charge of incitement of insurrection

over the insurrection but acquitted by the House. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell voted to acquit Trump, citing the fact that the former president was out of office by the time the Senate trial began, but McConnell said Trump was "practically and morally responsible for provoking" the riot. □

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Ledecky returns to competition with time ticking to Tokyo

By BETH HARRIS
AP Sports Writer

Like everyone else, Katie Ledecky was forced to shelve her plans when the coronavirus pandemic took hold. Instead of looking far into the future, the five-time Olympic champion swimmer switched to a more immediate mindset. Forget that the four-year cycle leading to the 2024 Paris Olympics is already underway. Ledecky is still working toward making a big splash at this summer's delayed Tokyo Games.

"In some ways not traveling over the past year and just being able to train has been really good for me and something I hope will pay dividends," she said from Northern California in a recent virtual interview. "I'm someone that really loves training. I kind of like the day-to-day of just going to work and putting in that work in the pool and eventually seeing the results."

Ledecky will take a measure of herself when she returns to national competition on Wednesday for the first time in a year. She's entered in six events at the TYR Pro Swim Series meet in San Antonio, Texas.

Ledecky is among several big names diving back in with three months to go until the U.S. Olympic trials. Caeleb Dressel, Simone Manuel, double backstroke world-record holder Regan Smith, and Ryan Lochte will swim over four days in the first single-site American meet since the pandemic began. Aiming to make his fifth Olympic team, Lochte is entered in five events.

Ledecky is entered in her usual events: 200-, 400-, 800- and 1,500-meter freestyles. She's also set to swim the 50 and 100 free.

Her Olympic schedule will focus on the 200, 400, 800 and 1,500, plus any relays. The 1,500 is a new women's event in Tokyo.

Last March, when it was announced the Tokyo Olympics were postponed, Ledecky resumed classes at Stanford. She had planned to take the year off from school leading up



This July 27, 2019, file photo shows United States' Katie Ledecky swimming in the women's 800m freestyle final at the World Swimming Championships in Gwangju, South Korea.

Associated Press

to the games; instead, she signed up for a full schedule of virtual classes in the spring and fall. She completed her psychology de-

gree with a minor in political science.

"That was a great silver lining," she said.

In the early days of the pan-

demic, Ledecky scrambled to find a pool to train in after Stanford shut down its facilities. She and Manuel worked out in a backyard

pool. "The main focus for that period of time was just keeping a feel for the water," she said. "We relied on each other and kept each other accountable and kept each other focused on our goals."

Last fall, Stanford and rival California staged small meets that Ledecky swam in. In January, she competed against training partners in a mock meet that included preliminaries and finals to make it resemble a real competition.

"I feel like some of these experiences have built my confidence," she said. "If I can swim fast in that kind of environment, I can swim fast at a big stage like Olympic trials or the games when maybe we won't have spectators." □

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Jets' Douglas praises Darnold, but open to trading QB

By DENNIS WASZAK Jr.
AP Pro Football Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Sam Darnold's time as the face of the New York Jets franchise might be nearing a disappointing end.

The 23-year-old quarterback was considered an untouchable player on the roster only a year ago. General manager Joe Douglas has backed off that stance, though, and it could signal a major change at the position as free agency and the NFL draft approach.

"I will answer the call if it's made," Douglas said Wednesday when asked if he'd listen to offers for Darnold. "As it pertains to Sam, Sam's, we think, a dynamic player in this league with unbelievable talent and who really, really has a chance to really hit his outstanding potential moving forward."

"But, you know, like I said earlier, if calls are made, I will answer."

Douglas' comments during a video call that included new coach Robert Saleh marked the first time the GM directly acknowledged being willing to trade Darnold. And that has the quarterback's future with the Jets murky — just three years after being hailed as a potential long-term solution at a position that has long lacked consistent production.

"Our stance on Sam hasn't changed," Douglas insisted. "He's an extremely talented player and he's very smart,



New York Jets quarterback Sam Darnold rolls out to pass against the New England Patriots in the first half of an NFL football game in Foxborough, Mass., in this Sunday, Jan. 3, 2021, file photo.

Associated Press

very tough. And we have no doubt that Sam is going to achieve his outstanding potential. Obviously, we're in the process of getting as much information as we can leading up through free agency and the draft." Then-GM Mike Maccagnan traded up in the draft to select Darnold with the No. 3 overall pick in 2018, but the quarterback has not lived up to those lofty expectations because of inconsistency and injuries. Former coach Adam Gase acknowledged he didn't help Darnold enough to thrive, and the Jets lacked playmaking talent to help him take the next step in his development.

While Darnold has shown flashes during his three NFL

seasons, there remain serious doubts as to whether he can lift the franchise. His contract also makes his status uncertain.

Darnold is entering the fourth year of his rookie deal and is scheduled to count \$9.8 million against the Jets' salary cap. While that's a manageable cost, New York has until May 3 to decide whether to exercise Darnold's fifth-year option — which would cost the Jets between \$15 million and \$20 million, fully guaranteed.

New York currently holds the No. 2 overall pick in the draft next month, and BYU's Zach Wilson and Ohio State's Justin Fields are among the names being mentioned as options for

the Jets.

But they are also being mentioned as potential suitors for Houston's Deshaun Watson, who wants out — although the Texans have, for now, insisted they have no intention of dealing the star quarterback. If the Texans do change their stance, any deal would likely have to include lots of draft capital. And that's something it doesn't appear Douglas is willing to part with.

"Ultimately, for us to get to where the great teams are, the most consistent teams are, you do that through the draft," Douglas said when asked his philosophy on hypothetically dealing picks for a star player. "For us to really be that team

that's consistently competing for Super Bowls, we have to hit on our draft picks."

While rumors swirl, Douglas contended that the Jets, who are expected to have about \$80 million to spend under the cap, have no immediate deadline on making a decision on Darnold or the quarterback position.

The Jets could also opt to stick with Darnold, for at least this year, and trade down from No. 2 to acquire several more roster-building draft picks.

"We're gathering as much information as we possibly can, especially as it pertains not only in free agency, but in this year's draft class," Douglas said.

Among other topics:

— Douglas said in January that safety Marcus Maye, scheduled to be a free agent, would be a priority for the team this offseason. Maye appears to be a likely candidate for a franchise tag. Agent Erik Burkhardt was critical of the Jets' handling of Maye's situation in a Twitter post Tuesday night, but Douglas brushed off those comments.

"I've had a lot of great conversations with (Burkhardt), and you guys know how I feel about Marcus," the GM said. "This is part of the business. This is part of negotiating. I don't see this affecting our ability to get something done with Marcus that's beneficial for both him and the team." □



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James, left, shoots as Phoenix Suns center Deandre Ayton defends during the second half of an NBA basketball game Tuesday, March 2, 2021, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

NBA says \$3 million going to HBCUs through All-Star Game

ATLANTA (AP) — The last shot of Sunday's NBA All-Star Game will be worth \$300,000 for either the Thurgood Marshall College Fund or United Negro College Fund, the league said Wednesday in revealing how an estimated \$3 million in charitable donations from the contest will be distributed.

Those two organizations that support historically Black colleges or universities will be the primary benefactors, each guaranteed \$500,000 in scholarship funding before the game even starts and with an additional \$750,000 at stake during the game.

The teams captained by LeBron James and Kevin Durant will each represent one of those groups, and the winning team in each of the first, second and third quarters will collect \$150,000 for their respective organization. The first team to hit the target score and win the All-Star Game will get the final \$300,000 in scholarship funds. Black institutions will see at least another \$1.25 million guaranteed from the skills competitions and All-Star Game, the NBA said. Each assist in the game will generate \$1,900 in scholarship funds; last year's game had 77 assists, which if matched this year would mean \$146,300. □